

WASHINGTON- Congressman Spencer Bachus today submitted a letter to Base Realignment and Closure Commission Chairman Anthony Principi urging him to reconsider the current decision to realign 23 Air National Guard bases, including the Birmingham International Airport Air Guard Station, which is home to the 117th Air Refueling Wing.

"Closing the 117th ARW makes absolutely no sense from a military or national security standpoint. It also makes no sense from a dollars and cents standpoint. I anticipate the continued and united support of the Alabama delegation in the effort to reverse this decision," Congressman Bachus stated.

"While the 117th ARW is one of 23 Air Guard bases to be realigned, even when considered alone, the proposal makes no sense. The proposed realignment will cost the city of Birmingham approximately \$250,000 a year, while only saving the Department of Defense \$23,000 a year. This decision is not right. You don't spend \$10 to save \$1," Bachus continued.

To date, \$73 million has been spent on Birmingham's infrastructure to make it a world-class tanker base. Today, there is space to bed down 13 aircraft, and next year the Birmingham Airport runway will be lengthened to 12,000 feet, yielding an increased capability that is greater than that of any of the airports to which the aircraft are to be relocated.

Currently, the Air National Guard provides the fire station, fire fighting equipment and 15 full-time firefighters to protect the Birmingham Airport, all of which will be lost if the current recommendations are to take effect.

The 117th ARW has nine aircraft, eight for primary authorized aircraft and one for backup aircraft inventory. The Secretary of Defense's current recommendations would move four aircraft to McGhee-Tyson APT AGS (134th Air Refueling Wing, Knoxville), Bangor International Airport AGS (101st Air Refueling Wing), and Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport AGS (161st Air Refueling Wing). Cost alone for new infrastructure at McGhee-Tyson to take our aircraft substantially exceeds the total cost savings.

In addition to local concerns, it is not clear that enclave bases "ones that will entirely lose their flying units but are expected to retain Expeditionary Combat Support units" can sustain combat units. Once flying units are removed, many bases will no longer be able to support military or civilian aircraft operations, and recruitment and retention will be much more difficult.

Today's letter comes as Congressman Bachus prepares to attend a regional BRAC hearing on June 30 in Atlanta.

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